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THE HERITAGE OF MIES

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The Heritage of Mies

BY NORBERT HANENBERG, DANIEL LOHMANN AND CHRISTIAN RAABE

Mies van der Rohe's built work covers a timeframe of over 60 years, including two world wars and several revolutionary events in the history of architecture. The extraordinary architect has influenced 20th century architecture worldwide like few others have. In the context of several restoration projects, the time has come to review the condition of his buildings: Is their materiality as timeless as their appearance? Did his constructions, which are of sometimes an experimental nature, prove to be sustainable, or did they fall into disrepair? How can Mies van der Rohe buildings be documented, repaired, restored, reconstructed, without losing the characteristic details of his work, and in order to preserve the architectural integrity and relevance of the Mies van der Rohe's oeuvre?

This journal is the result of a set of activities concerned with the documentation, restoration and artistic reception of the oeuvre of Mies van der Rohe. These endeavors go way beyond questions of an adequate conservation and restoration of his preserved buildings. They begin with an academic approach towards Mies van der Rohe's oeuvre in the context of several architecture schools, where his buildings are the focus of hand-in-hand teaching and research. The work with a current generation of architecture students and future protagonists may offer a relevant contribution to the actuality of Mies van der Rohe, especially in the discussion about Modern Movement and its allocation in a system of values that must be repeatedly reconsidered. In times of changing scientific objectives and methodology, research about this architect may offer new approaches and results, despite the large amount of literature that has shaped our image of Mies van der Rohe as an architect and a leading character of modernism. But beyond all theory, numerous projects from the practical world of conservation and restoration dealing with Mies van der Rohe's built work have been initiated or finished recently, after many of his buildings have reached the end of a chapter in their lifecycle. Finally, several quite diverse approaches to the curatorial dissemination of Mies van der Rohe's work through classical exhibitions and other ways of artistic reception and presentation have helped to show the role of modern architecture as a whole and its impact and relevance for our society.

The aim of this journal was to create a broad overview on the recent and current activities concerned with the heritage of Mies van der Rohe.

The exhibition *Mies and the Inheritance of Modernism*, which (Schunck* Glaspaleis Heerlen, Netherlands, April–August 2016) presented an overview of the built work of Mies van der Rohe with a detailed focus on five buildings and the

methods of their preservation and restoration. Through this exhibit, and its broad framework program of lectures, symposia and guided tours, awareness was successfully raised for the concerns of heritage conservation of modernism and especially the built work of Mies van der Rohe. The contribution of curator Andrea Croé in this issue gives a good insight into the general concept.

The essays present restoration projects and other activities from academia and dissemination, and follow the chronological order within the professional life of Mies van der Rohe. He was born in 1886 as the youngest son of a stonemason in the West German city of Aachen. Around the occasion of celebrating 130 years since Mies van der Rohe's birth, researchers Maike Scholz and Daniel Lohmann have gathered new information about Mies van der Rohe's professional and personal relations to his home town, in order to add a dimension to the understanding of his first years in practice and his later work.

Amongst the numerous assignments that Mies van der Rohe received from Krefeld, Germany, the silk factory *Verseidag* has been disproportionately neglected in research, although it was the only industrial building that he ever built. On the occasion of current reuse and restoration work, a group of researchers and students directed by Norbert Hanenberg and Daniel Lohmann joined the team of architects and restorers to provide a scientific consultancy. Their article shows the way in which restoration decisions are based on current investigations into the history and materiality of the building. A new tenant in the former gatehouse of the silk factory is the company Interface, who is contributing to revive the site. Interface has developed a strong interest in *Verseidag's* history and restoration, and has been a supporter in the realisation of this issue of the **docomomo Journal**.

Also in Krefeld, in the summer of 2013, an initiative of Christiane Lange led to a widely perceived and respected exhibition of a temporary artistic reconstruction of Mies van der Rohe's unbuilt Golf Club as a 1:1 model. In her article, she describes the project's background and the way, in which the architects Paul Robbrecht and Hilde Daem created an adequate and intelligent enrichment of the current discussion about full reconstruction through deliberate artistic abstraction and interpretation.

Concerned with the Krefeld commissions of Mies van der Rohe, Norbert Hanenberg and Daniel Lohmann have gathered new material from the archives of the *Verseidag* company archives to clarify the architectural history of the urban layout of the plant, and the possible involvement of

Mies van der Rohe in this process. In this way, the correlation of this last of his pre-war European commissions to his first American project – the urban design of the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago – was investigated and offered new information about continuity in his oeuvre.

The paper about the restoration of the Tugendhat house in Brno, Czech Republic by Ana Tostões, Ivo Hammer and Zara Ferreira present the spectrum between historic significance, thorough research and careful restoration that led to the revitalization and restored accessibility of the public to one of Mies van der Rohe's masterpieces.

Two of the buildings on the IIT campus have been restored recently, and help to show the importance of thorough preparatory studies in order to execute a comprehensive refurbishment preserving the building's structural and visual integrity. In the first article, Mark Sexton and his team deliver insight into the intense forensic research that was carried out on the S. R. Crown Hall, the heart of the Chicago campus, and the complex path towards material choices for its repair, in order to closely maintain the originally intended appearance of the Mies van der Rohe masterpiece. Secondly, Gunny Harboe was facing quite similar challenges in his restoration project of Robert F. Carr Memorial Chapel of Saint Savior, whose minimalism is expressed in the nickname "God Box". His article shows how the small building on the IIT campus was restored over a long period of time with challenging financial means, in order to rehabilitate the important religious and social function of the building on the campus.

Back in Berlin, Germany, and after its opening in 1968, the *Neue Nationalgalerie* had been in continuous intense use since its construction and was in urgent need of restoration. Because of the immense significance of the building, a meticulous process is currently being carried out in the coordination of a team of architects in the office of David Chipperfield. As the article by Martijn Jaspers shows, the project may serve as a textbook example of conservation in the future, in the same way that Chipperfield's *Neues Museum* concept has already enriched the conservation discussion not only in Berlin and Germany, but internationally.

With this variety of essays, not only significant restoration solutions are documented through different projects of outstanding value and in varying dimensions, but also a range of diverse methodologies for research and conservation. Historic building research contributes to understand and preserve the work of Mies van der Rohe. The survey of the original substance gives indications of the time determination of individual components and provides evidence for the reconstruction of the architectural concept and the process of construction. As shown in the case of the survey of the Verseidag site and the restoration of the Crown Hall, new assignments to the oeuvre are possible and temporal developments become visible. Without an understanding of the building's idea, the structure and the substance, restoration work and thus the preservation of the buildings of Mies van der Rohe are unthinkable.

His architecture is essentially determined by the selection and fitting of materials and less by constructive inventions. If we understand the concept of Tectonics in architecture

as a narrative element that leads the spatial structure, the volumes of material and space as the appearance of the materiality to a concerted statement, then this is very similar to the work of his important model Karl Friedrich Schinkel. Both combine traditions of architecture with their own new ideas. In this sense Schinkel commented very carefully on his *Bauakademie*:

"Some will rarely notice the novelty, whose (...) merit will lie more in the consistent application of a quantity of inventions made over a long period, which could not be brought together before in architecture".

Notes

- 1 Mackowsky, H., *Karl Friedrich Schinkel. Briefe, Tagebücher, Gedanken*, Berlin, 1922, 194 (Free translation).

Norbert Hanenberg

Architecture Studies at RWTH Aachen and University of the Arts in Berlin. Freelance architect since 2005 in Vienna (until 2014) and Aachen. Scientific researcher and lecturer for Design and Construction at RWTH Aachen University (2001-2013). Professor for Design and Construction at OWL University of Applied Sciences in Detmold, Germany (2015-2016). Professor for Design and Construction at THM University of Applied Sciences in Gießen, Germany (since 2016).

Daniel Lohmann

Architecture studies at RWTH Aachen and Edinburgh College of Art. Freelance architect in documentation and conservation since 2004. Research grant of the German Archaeological Institute (2006-2009). PhD degree from BTU Cottbus University (2015). Scientific researcher and lecturer for conservation and documentation at RWTH Aachen University (2009-2017). Professor for the History of Architecture at TH Köln University of Applied Sciences in Cologne, Germany (since 2017).

Christian Raabe

Architecture studies at Technical University of Berlin. PhD from RWTH Aachen University in 2007, where he is Full Professor for Historic Building Conservation and Research at the Faculty of Architecture. Scientific researcher and assistant professor at the Institute for History of Construction at the University of Cottbus (1993-1994). Lecturer at the International Film School in Cologne (1998-2002), and at the Berlin University of Applied Science (2001-2004). Founder and practicing architect at *Abri+Raabe Architekten*, since 1994, in partnership Martina Abri. Development of several conservation projects, such as the restoration of different Karl Friedrich Schinkel's architectural works. He has received the Schinkel Award by the Association of Architects and Engineers in Berlin (1997), and the Borchers Plaque by the RWTH Aachen University (2009).



01 Teaching on-site. RWTH Aachen teachers and students in Mies van der Rohe's Verseidag factory, Krefeld, Germany. © Daniel Lohmann, 2014.



Albert Schmeiders and Ludwig Mies, Harris Orlan, Aachen, Germany, © Daniel Lohmann, 2016.

“Zur Neuen Welt” – Towards the New World. Ludwig Mies and his Architectural Youth in Aachen.

BY MAIKE SCHOLZ AND DANIEL LOHMANN

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's personal and professional connections to his hometown Aachen in Germany are mostly unknown today. Through the analysis of both old and new written and graphic sources, the authors give an insight into Mies van der Rohe's lifelong bond to his hometown. In the personal friendships, his friends Ferdinand Goebbels and Franz Dominick play a key role. Furthermore, the paper presents previously unknown buildings that young Mies was working on in the office of Albert Schneiders around 1905. One of the buildings, the house “Zur Neuen Welt” for client Joseph Oeben, is still standing and represents a lively example of the stylistic search in architecture after the turn of the millennium, and an early step towards Mies van der Rohe's architectural maturity.

Letters from the Past

In 1947, almost 10 years after Mies van der Rohe's emigration to the United States and shortly after WWII, the architect received two letters from one of his childhood friends from his hometown Aachen.

Little is known about the activities and personal connections in Aachen of the man, who later called himself Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and became one of the most important architects of the 20th century: who were his companions in the early years? Which of these connections lasted throughout his later life? Where did he get his first education in the field of architecture and construction? What projects did young Ludwig Mies work on?

Those almost forgotten letters from Germany give a rare insight into the first years of Mies's career, decades before he was well established in the United States as a teacher and an architect. The sender Franz Dominick (1888-1954) was also an architect, born in Aachen, and a companion of Ludwig Mies in the early years of his career in both Aachen and Berlin. Dominick had not been in contact with Mies for 25 years. In these more than two decades, he had worked in a successful architectural office in his home town together with Ferdinand Goebbels (1885-1955), another childhood comrade of the two. Their office, Goebbels & Dominick, had built numerous houses, settlements, churches and other buildings between the end of the war and 1939 that are still present in Aachen's cityscape and the surroundings today².

Dominick's letters from March and August of 1947 are seemingly written amidst the rubble of destroyed Aachen. While his main intention was to ask for work in his postwar hardship, both of his letters include melancholic accounts of their youth and early career. Dominick recalls joint activities like hikes in the nearby Eifel region. He even suggests to write a biography of the years of apprenticeship between 1908 and 1920 — what he calls the *Werdejahre* of his now-famous old friend and the common time in Aachen

and Berlin. His description gives an insight into the relatively unknown first steps of Mies's architectural career. “I would start with the first years at Albert Schneiders — Öben house with the Prometheus – Levy – then Behrens – Riehl – Perls – Kröller (...)”³. While Riehl and Perls are known as original works of Mies in Berlin, and Kröller is a project of Peter Behrens, the first two listed houses Öben and Levy have never been mentioned before. This short list can be considered as a rare account of the buildings that young Mies was working on in his first years of practise. Are the two unknown projects original ones, or did he work on them in his time of employment in the architecture office of Albert Schneiders between 1904 and 1905? Interestingly, Dominick does not mention the only project known through Mies's own memories of this time — the Leonhard Tietz department store at Aachen's market place.

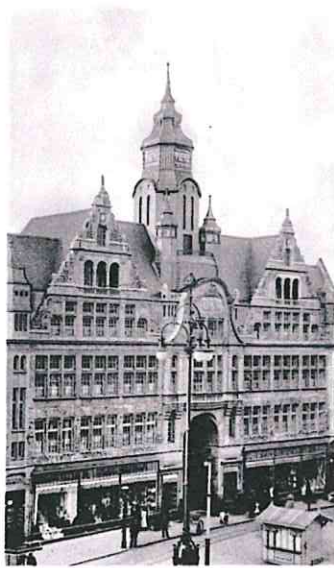
Albert Schneiders

Three employers of young Ludwig Mies are known. After first experiences in his father's shop and as a mason on construction sites, he got a job in the studio of architect and stucco factory owner Max Fischer. After half a year in the office he was promoted to the drafting room. Mies spoke of this job as a time of intense learning to draw full-scale ornaments in all styles⁴. The next architect to hire him was a man with the widespread Rhineland name, Goebbels. He was certainly neither Ferdinand nor his father, as it has been suggested by previous research. Ferdinand was obviously a youngster himself, and Ferdinand's father Johann Wilhelm was a simple stoker⁵. Mies's employer was most likely a man with the illustrious name Josef Goebbels, architect and member of the Aachen town council. His family relation with Ferdinand is unknown.

Mies's last and most influential boss before his departure to Berlin was the architect and engineer Albert Schneiders (1871-1922) (figure 01). His office was an enterprise success-



01 Architect Albert Schneiders (1871-1922).
© Private collection of Gabriele Schneiders,
Aachen.



02 Albert Schneiders, Department Store
Leonhard Tietz, Aachen, Germany,
1910. © Private collection of
the authors.



03 Albert Schneiders (attributed,
in collaboration with Ludwig Mies),
Levy house, 163 Oppenhoffallee,
Aachen, Germany.
© Daniel Lohmann, 2017.

fully involved in the Wilhelminian Gründerzeit building boom at the turn of the century. The list of employees included not only young Mies and his friends Ferdinand Goebbels and Franz Dominick, but also a few years later Emil Fahrenkamp (1885-1966)⁶, another Aachen born architect who was to become famous later on.

There are numerous buildings by Albert Schneiders in Aachen. In the Frankenberger Quarter alone, which was mainly developed and built between 1874 and the WWI, at least 19 buildings were designed and built by his office⁷. He has been described as one of the “outstanding architects”, who was responsible for ambitious, original and bizarre façade designs. Schneiders’s opulent buildings are rich illustrations of the typical mixture of styles near the end of the 19th century. His eclectic combinations of historic styles, floral motives and mythical creatures are considered to be “climaxes” of the architecture in the quarter⁸.

Department Store Leonhard Tietz

The participation of Mies in the studio of Schneiders is still only linked to the project for the Jewish department store company of Leonhard Tietz to design and construct their local branch opposite Aachen town hall. In an anecdote, Mies himself told the story of his hiring in the office: “He had conceived a highly ornamental façade for the building, but his reach was greater than his grasp; he couldn’t draw it. He asked me if I could. I said, ‘Yes’. He wanted to know how long it would take. I said ‘do you want it this evening? Or do I have a little more time?’ He looked at me as if I were a fraud for promising to do it so fast. ‘Give it to me tomorrow’, he said, and I did. Then he asked me to work for him”⁹.

Schneiders must have had a high opinion of his new employee, since he paid the tuition fees for his evening and Sunday classes at Aachen art school *Kunstgewerbeschule* for a period of time¹⁰. Apparently, they were too high for

Ludwig or his father Michael Mies, who had already asked for a municipal grant for Ludwig’s attendance at vocational school around 1900¹¹. In the *Kunstgewerbeschule* Mies took classes in structural theory, statics, mathematics, design and life drawing, as two of his classmate friends confirmed in a letter many years later¹².

The Tietz department store was certainly the biggest project for Schneiders’s office, and a good scope for Mies to perform his drafting-skills. The elevation of the building is a perfect example of the office’s pluralism of styles. It is composed of two symmetrical gabled façades in neo-renaissance shapes, joined by a tall tower and a central projection in Art Nouveau style above the monumental arched entrance (figure 02). The ornaments cannot be studied in situ anymore, since the building was demolished in the fall of 1965. However, all of Mies’s memories can be confirmed in the preserved building authority file¹³:

A first set of drawings with the signature of Schneiders was handed in for an application on 31 August 1904. The following half-year was filled with stylistic discussions, written requests, and changes of plans. Mies acknowledged receipt of a set of drawings by proxy of Albert Schneiders on an official form of the municipal authorities on 24 November 1904. The first building permit is dated 8 February 1905, but under the condition of plan revision by Schneiders. A final set of plans was handed in on 25 May 1905. Construction work started on 17 June 1905. The Berlin based construction company Boswau & Knauer announced their taking over of the responsibilities for the project in an official letter to the mayor’s office on 25 July 1905. This is the incident that appeared like a hostile takeover for young Mies, when an invasion of people from the Berlin head office came to Aachen¹⁴. In fact, it was quite common in the construction process of department stores. Often times, stores throughout Germany were designed by smaller local practises



04 Albert Schneiders and Ludwig Mies, *Haus Oeben*, Aachen, Germany. Façade detail. © Daniel Lohmann, 2017.

and built by Boswau & Knauer¹⁵. At least, one of the new colleagues inspired Mies to take a chance and go to Berlin for new professional challenges¹⁶.

Due to its scale and duration, the Tietz project was the one that Mies worked on throughout all of his months in Schneiders's office. The Levy and Oeben houses mentioned by Franz Dominick, were smaller assignments.

Levy

In a written record by Ilse, the youngest of Albert and Adele Schneiders's nine children, she writes of her mother having said "their father had designed and built noble family homes for many wealthy Jewish clients. They were his favorite"¹⁷. This statement may be linked to the typical Jewish name Levy given in the project list of Dominick's Letter. Quite possibly, the name refers to Ludwig Levy, a manager of the Königsberger cloth mill, who had a family home built on the grand main avenue of the Frankenberger Quarter, *Kaiserallee* (today 163 *Oppenhoffallee*)¹⁸. The house was built in 1905, with an ornamental façade that can be ascribed to Albert Schneiders by stylistic means¹⁹ (figure 03). The typical noble townhouse has an almost 8-meter-wide façade, four main stories, plus a fifth in the mansard. Neo-gothic and Art Nouveau floral ornaments articulate the façade. Combined with the relatively large amount of unornamented wall surfaces, the house is a good example for the tendency of façade designers slowly shifting away from overly rich historicist façades, but keeping some of their *horror vacui*.

If this building is the Levy house mentioned in Dominick's letter, it may serve as a good example of the ornamented façades that Schneiders had designed, but needed to hire the skilled 19-year old draftsman Ludwig Mies to make the necessary drawings of it. Secondly, it highlights the development of Schneiders's style in the early 1900s.

Towards the New World

The second building mentioned by Franz Dominick is the *Haus Oeben* and could be identified as a building located at 109 *Alexanderstrasse* in an old working-class neighborhood on the eastern edge of the old town limits. The name refers to the owner Joseph Oeben (b. 1853), who was a key figure in the early days of the Aachen social democratic party around the turn of the century²⁰. Oeben was a politician, a party delegate and managing editor of the local social democrat newspaper *Rheinische Zeitung*. Most importantly, Oeben was an innkeeper and intended to replace his existing small tavern with a new pub and venue on his site in *Alexanderstrasse* in 1903. The emerging socialist movement and trade unions urgently needed a meeting place. Furthermore, Oeben himself and other party members intended to live in the projected flats at the same address.

The planning application of 8 January 1904 includes plans drawn by the office of Albert Schneiders. The project was to build a mixed-use townhouse in the 5.36-meter-wide plot with a pub and venue in the tall ground floor and tenements on the three upper floors²¹. The ground floor was to be much higher than those of the neighboring houses, with a gallery inside and a large opening towards the street spanned by a single round arch, subdivided into three segments with smaller round arches above the two side bays. Schneiders's elevation (figure 05) shows a symmetrical façade richly ornamented in stucco on the lower two floors. Both of the upper floors had a projecting central bay window and were covered with shingles. The whole top floor was to be roofed by a steep gable with an ornamented pediment in its upper half, bargeboards and a globe at the ridge.

The iconography of the façade uses common socialist symbols²². On the left side of the figurative frieze above the ground floor arch, a blindfolded Lady Justice is holding scales and symbolizes freedom and justice. To the right,



05 Albert Schneiders, *Haus Oeben*, Aachen, Germany. Street elevation drawing of Oeben House from the building application of January 1904. © City Archives, Aachen. Signature *Baupolizei Alexanderstraße 109, Bl.42.*

Prometheus is shackled to a rock, with an eagle picking his liver, representing inner renewal and awakening. The handshake in the center above the arch is one of the most popular social democratic icons and symbolizes consensus and unity. The pediment at the top shows a landscape under a rising sun – a symbol for progress, and the dawn of a new era. Certainly, these attributes were designed by request of the leftist client Wilhelm Oeben.

The building was constructed between 1904 and May 1905. A euphoric newspaper article in Oeben's own *Rheinische Zeitung* on 22 April 1905 announces the opening and describes the building as "clean and beautiful like no other building in Aachen"²³. In great contrast to Schneiders's original plans, the building was given an entirely different appearance. Instead of stucco and wood, the whole façade was built of granite ashlar blocks. The ground floor opening was in the form of a basket arch, asymmetrically subdivided into two rectangular openings on the left and a shouldered arch on the right. Instead of a frieze above the arch, the characteristic curved lettering "*Zur Neuen Welt*" was carved into the granite. It can be translated into "towards the new world" (figure 04) and is a replacement for the rising sun icon in the original design. At the same time, it provided a distinctive name for the new socialist pub, and served as a literal accentuation of the threshold into the building's political world.

Above the arched ground floor, the façade is vertically divided into five equal bays. Triple windows in the three central bays lighten the rooms of the second story. The two



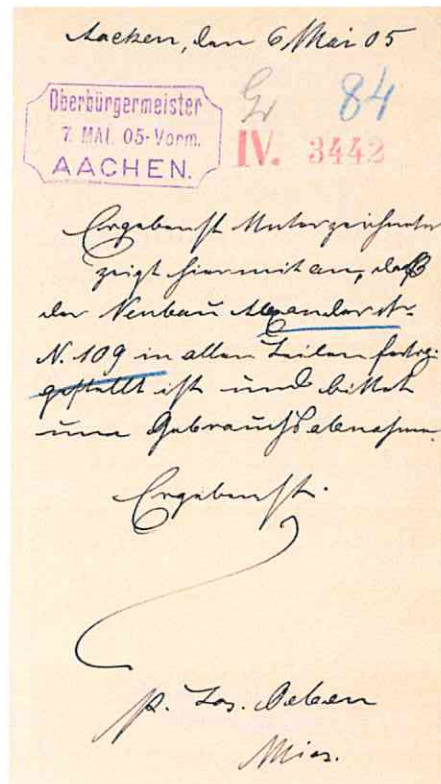
06 Albert Schneiders and Ludwig Mies, *Haus Oeben*, Aachen, Germany. Street photo of *Alexanderstraße* in the early 1940s. The *Haus Oeben* (second building from the left) still has its pediment. © City Archives, Aachen. Signature *SLG Strassenfotos Alexanderstraße I Bl.29.*

marginal bays are slightly recessed blind windows. From the newspaper article in *Rheinische Zeitung* we learn that these were supposed to carry galvanized, larger-than-life sculptures of Liberty, Fraternity and Justice, which were not yet in place at the time of the opening. Their realization is generally questionable, for in the only available photo of the building from before the war (figure 06), they are as absent as they are today²⁴. The three windows are tied together by a single suspended wrought iron window box, detailed with classical acanthus leaves and two lamps hanging from their ends, lighting the lettering below. Above the windows, a massive drip mould carries two rows of English bay windows, vertically drawing together the upper two stories of the building.

Much of the riddle of today's appearance of the building (figure 07) is caused by the fact that an important part of its shape and its main ornamental feature was lost in the WWII: a large and richly ornamented pediment displaying the Prometheus mentioned in Dominick's letter (figure 06). A relief representation of the Ancient Greek myth had become the central figurative feature of the building. Quite commonly in art and architecture, Prometheus served as a welcome symbol of renewal and the striving for a new world after a general awakening at the turn of the century, especially in social democratic and working class milieus²⁵. Ironically, this feature was lost when the upper floors of the house burned out in the WWII. Prometheus had literally fallen, and his supporting gable was dismantled in 1955 when the damaged parts of the house were reconstructed for a rental use. The pub and



07 Albert Schneiders and Ludwig Mies, Haus Oeben, Aachen, Germany. The façade today without the pediment. © Daniel Lohmann, 2016.



08 Ludwig Mies, Haus Oeben, Aachen. Page from the construction authority file. © City Archives, Aachen. Signature Baupolizei Alexanderstraße 109, Bl.84–Bl.85.

the remaining façade however were preserved, and partially renewed several times after the war. The building requires urgent care and monument protection today.

The overall style of the house is nothing like Albert Schneiders's other buildings, neither before nor after 1905. The noticeable formal immaturity of the building is uncommon in his perfectly composed façades. Furthermore, in its lack of ornament, the building design follows entirely different English and American contemporary trends in architecture than the historicism and eclecticism of Schneiders's other work. What was the reason for this striking difference between the first design and the realized façade?

There is strong evidence for Mies's involvement with the project in the building authority file: in a handwritten request Ludwig Mies asks the municipality for acceptance of completed construction work on 6 May 1905 (figure 08). In contrast to the acknowledgement of receipt for drawings in the Tietz file, the young employee does not sign by proxy of Schneiders anymore, but in fact "for the client" himself²⁶. Furthermore, a closer look at the letters on the Oeben building shows strong formal parallels with the typography that Mies and illustrator Gerhard Severain (1878-1959) designed for a poster competition two years later, in Autumn 1907. As Thomas Steigenberger and Dietrich Neumann found out, the two Aachen friends created a graphic design entry for Hohenzollern Kunstgewerbehaus Berlin²⁷. The poster was published in *Berliner Architekturwelt* in 1908²⁸. Mies had acquired lettering skills in his father's stone mason workshop, as he claimed several times in interviews with

his grandson, Dirk Lohan: "I was good at lettering, with all that work on the tombstones behind me"²⁹. The similarities in lettering and Mies's "tombstone expertise" suggest that he was the one designing the typography of "Zur Neuen Welt". These factors indicate that Albert Schneiders meanwhile had entrusted young Mies with much larger responsibilities than those of a simple draftsman. The Oeben building was designed and built just at the time when Mies became seriously interested in philosophy and culture through his regular reading of the magazine *Die Zukunft*, an issue of which he had come across on his first day at Schneiders's³⁰. This was the time of intellectual awakening for the young man, and the simultaneous work for leftist Wilhelm Oeben and his building with its socialist iconography must have served as a strong encouragement and a first encounter with intellectual depth in architecture.

Aachen and Berlin

However large Ludwig Mies's responsibilities for Haus Oeben were – its programmatic slogan became the motto for his following career. He took the first step of moving to the new world of Berlin shortly after the building was opened. When the 19-year old made the decision to seek his fortune in the metropolis of Berlin in the late summer of 1905, it was not without the support of his Aachen background. The courageous step seems to have been facilitated by the fact that several Aachen friends also had already moved to Berlin or were in the process of doing so. The following years in Berlin clearly illustrate the role of his friendships through collective projects with them.

It was the aforementioned Gerhard Severain who had already moved to Berlin in late 1904³¹ and smoothed the way for his eight years younger friend Ludwig Mies to follow a year later. Dietrich Neumann highlighted the relevance of the friendship of the two, who worked together on numerous projects from 1907 until at least 1947. The cooperation went much further than graphic work for the poster competition, as the Ryder house in Wiesbaden shows, that Mies and Severain worked on in closest collaboration in 1923. Furthermore, Severain was responsible for the lettering work for the German section of the Barcelona world fair in 1929.

After a short time in the municipality of Berlin Rixdorf, Mies was recorded as being back in Aachen for two months in the spring of 1907³². The reason for his stay at home is not known, but it is peculiar that several other Aachen friends followed him to Berlin afterwards.

The first to join him was his childhood friend and Aachen vocational school classmate, painter Peter Foerster (1887-1948)³³. Foerster attended painting classes in the same art school *Berliner Kunstgewerbemuseum* that Severain had joined in 1905. Mies inscribed in this school in June 1907 right after his return from Aachen³⁴. He quickly became one of the best students of the school's new director Bruno Paul, but was never employed in Paul's office, according to Thomas Steigenberger³⁵. The close friendship of Peter Foerster and Mies is largely unknown, but documented in memories of Foerster and his wife Ortrud³⁶, and in a written affirmation of Mies, given to her in June 1963³⁷. In this letter, Mies confirms their friendship with weekly visits from 1900 until Mies's emigration to the US, school companionships, their joint membership of *Novembergruppe*, and Mies's appointment of Peter Foerster as his personal assistant for the design of the German division in the Barcelona world fair in 1929. The certificate shows that two graphic artists and Aachen friends accompanied Mies on his famous Barcelona mission. Two further Aacheners already known, Ferdinand Goebbels and Franz Dominick, followed Mies to Berlin in 1907 or 1908³⁸. Although exact times are unknown, it is most likely that the three of them were hired together in the studio of Peter Behrens in Potsdam Babelsberg³⁹. A private photograph shows Mies, Goebbels and Dominick with six other colleagues in Behrens's *Erdmannshof* atelier (figure 09). Dominick probably also attended classes of Bruno Paul, calling himself *Kunststudierender* in the Berlin Address book just like Mies⁴⁰.

The following years until about 1913 are rather well documented regarding Mies, and were a time of intense collaboration on different levels between these three friends. In the first years, they seem to have lived in Babelsberg near Behrens atelier, as the letters of fellow employee Charles-Edouard Jeanneret — Le Corbusier — suggest⁴¹. Mies for example rented a room in *Villa Mehlbose, Teltower Strasse*⁴² just around the corner from *Erdmannshof*. The three friends worked for Behrens in the following months and years.

Mies's widely recognized debut as an independent architect was the house for philosopher Alois Riehl in Potsdam *Neubabelsberg*. When Sofie Riehl in 1906 asked the aspirant architect for her new house, what he had designed him-

09 Scene in the office of Peter Behrens, Potsdam Babelsberg with Ferdinand Goebbels, Franz Dominick, Ludwig Mies and Walter Gropius.
© Private collection of Mathilde Schillings, Aachen.



self, Mies answered "nothing. (...) But, I *can* build a house. I just haven't done it on my own"⁴³. Surely it was the newly revealed Aachen projects that gave the 20-year old the self-confidence to answer in this way, and the necessary architectural skills to work on his debut. Franz Dominick lists the Riehl house in his letter after naming Peter Behrens, obviously because he at least witnessed his friend working on it. This detail strengthens the position of Thomas Steigenberger and Dietrich Neumann, who proposed a new dating for the construction of the Riehl house between 1908 and 1909 and in the time when they already worked at Behrens atelier, instead of the commonly accepted year 1907. Steigenberger suggests that Mies started the Riehl project mid-May 1908 after leaving the *Kunstgewerbeschule* for "private projects"⁴⁴.

Mies spent almost one year in Aachen from July 1910 to May 1911 trying to establish himself as an independent architect from his family home at 84 *Vaalser Strasse*⁴⁵. Local projects that he worked on during this time could not be found yet, but it is the period when he prepared the well-known and widely published competition entry for the Bismarck monument with his brother Ewald Mies (1877-1962). Another project that he started working on from Aachen was the private house for Hugo Perls in Berlin Zehlendorf. It was one of the projects that he and Ferdinand Goebbels worked on in close collaboration, and it was built in 1911-1912⁴⁶.

Around January 1912, Mies got into a quarrel with Peter Behrens over the famous Villa for the Kröller-Müllers in Wassenaar (Netherlands), which caused a split and became a turning point in Mies's career⁴⁷. Mies worked in The Hague for eight months after this, working out his own project for the Kröllers. After the return to Berlin in the fall, the friendship of Mies, Goebbels and Dominick was apparently close enough to share an apartment at 14 *Südenstraße* in Berlin *Steglitz*. They had taken over the flat from fellow Aachener Gerhard Severain in 1912. Ferdinand Goebbels used the same address on his printed business letterhead that he and Mies used in their correspondence with their next client Ernst Werner in October 1912⁴⁸. The letter not only clearly documents their collaboration on Werner's house but it also shows that Goebbels and Mies had also worked together

on the Kröller-Müller project throughout most of 1912: the letter was written in Aachen after the end of the Kröller project, signed by Mies and Goebbels and apologizing for late replies to their future client, because both were “absent on business in Aachen and Holland” together. Quite possibly, Franz Dominick was also with them, for he mentioned Kröller in his list of joint projects in both of his letters.

Mies and Goebbels built Haus Werner during 1913. The authorship of the house caused a lively discussion in science, mostly because of the unsubtle similarities with Peter Behrens’s Wiegand House of 1911–1912. Wolf Tegethoff suggests the authorship of Ferdinand Goebbels rather than Mies, for Mies would have hardly copied Behrens so closely after their split, and because Goebbels still worked for Behrens and was apparently involved in the Wiegand project⁴⁹. In any case, a second letter by Mies to Ernst Werner about their fees after the end of the project suggests that the house was designed at least in close collaboration by the two⁵⁰.

The house may be regarded as the last step in the two men’s bachelorship. Both Mies and Goebbels got married after this project. Mies settled down to family life with Ada Bruhn in Berlin *Lichterfelde* in April 1913, and Goebbels was engaged to Berta Kinkartz in Aachen in July 1913⁵¹. Franz Dominick also moved back to Aachen in the same year. At the latest after WWI they started an architectural office together: *Goebbels & Dominick - Atelier für Hochbau und Raumkunst*.

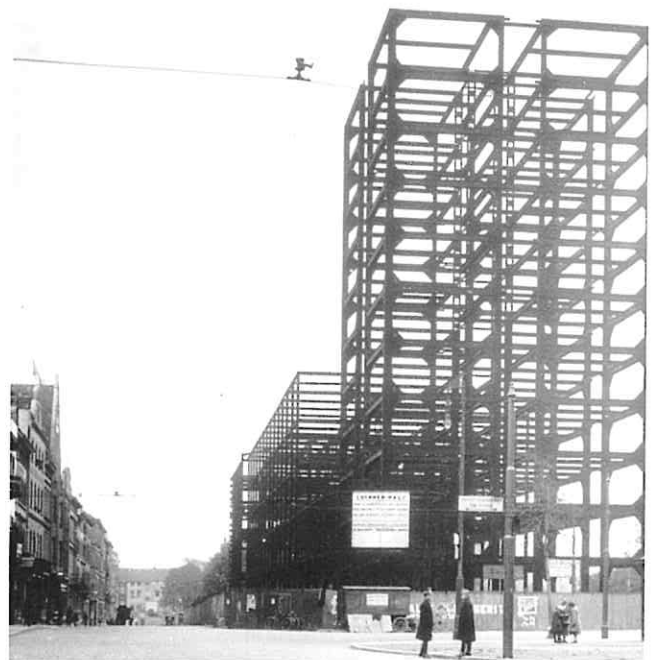
1920s

After his military service in the WWI, Ludwig Mies reached a “mental turning point”⁵², taking harsh personal and professional turns around 1921–1922. After separating from his wife Ada and family, he changed his surname into “Mies van der Rohe”. Several theories have evolved about this pseudonym. A previously unknown detail helps to support some of these rather than others: The name was invented together with the aforementioned friend Peter Foerster, as his wife recalls: “They chose an artist’s name for Mies, who was actually called Louis Mies, he became “Mies van der Rohe” now. Pitt was supposed to become “Pitt van Aken” according to Mies, but he didn’t want to”⁵³. It was Ludwig’s mother’s maiden name that served as a new name affix after the ennobling “van der”⁵⁴. Interestingly, Amalie’s maiden name was not Rohe, but in fact Rohé⁵⁵. The detail that Foerster and Mies did not choose “Mies de la Rohé”, but “Mies van der Rohe” and respectively “Pitt van Aken” stresses the nature of the pseudonyms to obviously underline their common hometown by using a distinct Dutch tone.

The strong bonds to Aachen, and his continued interest in local construction activity is documented in a previously unidentified attempt to convince an Aachen investor of his architectural talent and to win him as a client: Mies van der Rohe wrote a letter to the entrepreneur Rudolf Lochner on 12 December 1924, asking to become the architect for his latest development: the private completion of a stalled municipal office development just opposite the train station⁵⁶. Mies van der Rohe emphasizes the fact that he was born in Aachen, and claims that he had heard about the project from his “Aachen friends”. His interest is caused by the fact

that Lochner intended to find an “absolutely contemporary solution” for the intended high-rise building. To convince Lochner, Mies van der Rohe included images of some of his projects with his letter. Certainly, these were photographs of some of the famous imaginary “five projects” of 1921–1923⁵⁷, including the high-rise *Friedrichstraße Office Building* and the *Glass Skyscraper* that were extensively used for advertising by Mies van der Rohe in these years⁵⁸.

Mies van der Rohe proposes, that an “appropriate character from Aachen” could be committed to the construction supervision, for he himself intended to work on the project from Berlin⁵⁹. He could not have thought of Albert Schneiders, who had died of a cardiac insufficiency in 1922. More likely, Goebbels & Dominick were the Aachen friends that he had in mind, when he suggested local partners. The three friends kept contact and occasionally met in Aachen in the 1920s⁶⁰. At the same time, this proposal shows that Mies van der Rohe had finally ruled out the possibility of returning to Aachen — even for a prestigious project like this one. However, Mies van der Rohe’s barely buildable high-rise schemes apparently were too avant-garde for Rudolf Lochner, who instead chose an architect who had already built large scale projects. Emil Fahrenkamp was hired in early 1925⁶¹ instead of Mies van der Rohe, who had only built mainly family homes thus far. Although the two competitors had followed a very similar and partly simultaneous education, including *Gewerbe und Kunstgewerbeschule Aachen*, as well as employment at both Max Fischer and Albert Schneiders’s offices⁶², Fahrenkamp had become a busy architect for large industrial and office projects and a



10 Emil Fahrenkamp, Lochner building, Aachen, Germany. Under construction in the mid-1920s. © Private collection of the authors.

Professor in Düsseldorf in the meantime. Still, this acquisition attempt to find an opportunity for the realization of his ambitious skyscraper design projects of the early 1920s shines a new light on the realistic background of Mies van der Rohe's imaginary 1920s projects.

Lochner's subsequent project itself and its checkered history are well known. Construction work on the expressionist design started in mid-1925. The building promised to become Germany's first full steel frame high-rise tower⁶³. However, once the steel skeleton had been erected, Lochner withdrew from the project for economic reasons. The development stalled again for several years, and the characteristic silhouette of the steel frame became a famous symbol of failed investment (figure 10). Only between 1929 and 1930, when the responsibility for the building was taken back by the municipality, it was completed to an entirely different design by Jacob Koerfer and was renamed *Haus Grenzwatcht*⁶⁴. It remains relatively unaltered today.

Towards another New World

The final step towards the new world was Mies van der Rohe's emigration to the US in 1938. He left Germany via Aachen, using the support and passport of his brother Ewald. Throughout and after WWII, he always kept in contact with the old world. On at least four visits to his home town, Mies met old friends from architecture and art, including the *Baubaus* alumnus and painter Carl Schneiders (1905-1975), the youngest son of his first mentor Albert Schneiders. During another occasion in 1953, he dined with his brother and Ferdinand Goebbels in a local restaurant⁶⁵. Franz Dominick was most likely not a member of this party, for he and Goebbels had gone their separate ways after a lawsuit over the breakup of their office partnership in 1939. Mies van der Rohe had not answered the first of Dominick's letters and probably neither the second one. It is unknown whether they were ever in contact again before Dominick's death in 1954.

Notes

- 1 The literature covering the very first years of Mies career includes: Wolf Tegethoff, "Catching the Spirit: Mies's Early Work and the Impact of the 'Prussian Style'", in Terence Riley, Barry Bergdoll (ed.), *Mies in Berlin*, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 2001, 135-151; Franz Schulze, Edward Windhorst, *Mies van der Rohe. A Critical Biography*, New and Revised Edition, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2012, 3-55; Adam Oellers, *Ludwig Mies van der Rohe und Ewald Mies in Aachen*, Aachen, Museum Burg Frankenberg, 1986 and others. We would like to thank the following persons for access to archive material, fruitful discussions and information: Magdalena Droste (Berlin/Cottbus), Gabriele Schneiders, Mathilde Schillings (1919-2017), Marlis Nacken, Holger A. Dux (all Aachen), and Paul Galloway (MoMA New York).
- 2 In contrast to the extent of the built work of Goebbels & Dominick, literature about the office is rare. See Holger Dux, *Geschichte(n) aus Stein und Stuck. Ein baugeschichtlicher Rundgang durch das Aachen zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen*, Aachen, G. Mainz Verlag, 1997, 221; and unpublished lecture manuscripts kindly provided by Holger A. Dux. A separate publication about the Goebbels & Dominick office is currently in preparation by the authors of this essay.
- 3 Library of Congress, Washington, Mies van der Rohe papers, Private Correspondence, Box 25. Literally: "Ich würde beginnen mit den ersten Jahren bei Albert Schneiders - Haus Oben mit dem Prometheus - Levy - dann Bebens (...)"
- 4 Franz Schulze, Edward Windhorst, *op. cit.*, 11.
- 5 City Archives Aachen, Birth certificate of Ferdinand Goebbels.
- 6 The employment of F. Goebbels was confirmed by Gabriele Schneiders, granddaughter of Albert, pers. comm.; For F. Dominick see above, Fn. 3; For Fahrenkamp see Christoph Heuter, *Emil Fabrenkamp 1885-1966. Architekt im rheinisch-westfälischen Industriegebiet*, Petersberg, Michael Imhof Verlag, 2002, 582.
- 7 Peter Ruhnau, *Das Frankenberger Viertel in Aachen*, Arbeitshefte des Landeskonservators Rheinland, Köln, Rheinland-Verlag, 1976, 46.
- 8 *Id.*, 46: " Fassaden, die sich in anspruchsvoller Weise vom Durchschnitt abheben"; *Ibid.*, 43: "Urheber der originellsten und bizarrsten Fassaden"; *Ibid.*, 180: "außerordentlich virtuose Beherrschung der barocken Formenwelt".
- 9 Museum of Modern Art, New York, Mies van der Rohe Archives, Interview with Dirk Lohan, 1968, in Franz Schulze, Edward Windhorst, *op. cit.*, 12-13.
- 10 Gabriele Schneiders, personal communication.
- 11 Museum of Modern Art, New York, Mies van der Rohe Archives, Mies personal Documents. Folder #3. Certificate of the City Archives Aachen to Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, 23 December 1955.
- 12 Museum of Modern Art, New York, Mies van der Rohe Archives, Mies personal Documents. Folder #3. Certificate of painter Franz Heffels and architect Alex Lürken to Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, 1 January 1956.
- 13 City archives Aachen, Building Authority File Markt 45-47.
- 14 Franz Schulze, Edward Windhorst, *op. cit.*, 13.
- 15 The practise of the construction company Boswau und Knauer (not "Bossler und Knorr", as it has been mistakenly transcribed from Mies's narrations) was recently investigated by Silke Haps, *Industriebetriebe der Baukunst - Generalunternehmer des frühen 20. Jahrhunderts: Die Firma Boswau & Knauer*, Dortmund, TU Dortmund Dissertation, 2014. The Aachen Tietz however was hardly included in her research, due to its demolition and heterogeneous sources.
- 16 Franz Schulze, Edward Windhorst, *op. cit.*, 13.
- 17 Letter of Ilse Caspers, née Schneiders (youngest daughter of Albert Schneiders) to her niece Gabriele Schneiders, 1997. Private collection. "(...) dass der Vater für viele reiche jüdische Bauberren großzügige Einfamilienhäuser entworfen und gebaut hat. Sie seien ihm die angenehmsten Auftraggeber gewesen".
- 18 Address book of Aachen 1908.
- 19 Peter Ruhnau, *op. cit.*, 246; Unfortunately, the building authority file of the house is not preserved.
- 20 The publication of the political history of Aachen Social Democrats "SPD", including the person Joseph Oeben and a short history of the *Haus Oeben* is the merit of Achim Grossmann. See Achim Grossmann, *Die roten Gesellen im schwarzen Westen. Die frühe Geschichte der sozialdemokratischen Bewegung in der Aachener Region. Ein Beitrag zur 150-jährigen Geschichte der SPD*, Düren, Hahne & Schloemer, 2014, 183-191. The architecture of the building and the connection with Albert Schneiders and Ludwig Mies had not been uncovered at that time.
- 21 City Archives Aachen, Building authority file *Alexanderstrasse 109*.
- 22 <http://www.dasrotewien.at/symbole-sozialdemokratische.html>.
- 23 Rheinische Zeitung n. 95 of 22 April 1905, in Achim Grossmann, *op. cit.*, 188.
- 24 See another photo taken on the same day in Achim Grossmann, *op. cit.*, 190.
- 25 Bettina Vaupel, *Göttergleich - gottverlassen. Prometheus in der bildenden Kunst des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, Weimar, vDG, 2005, 157-167.
- 26 City Archives Aachen, Building authority file *Alexanderstraße 109*. Literally: "Ergebnst Unterzeichnender zeigt hiermit an, daß der Neubau Alexanderstraße N. 109 in allen Teilen fertig gestellt ist und bittet um Gebrauchsabnahme. Ergebnis, f. Jos.(eph) Oeben, Mies".
- 27 Thomas Steigenberger, "Mies van der Rohe - ein Schüler Bruno Pauls?", in Johannes Cramer, Dorothee Sack (ed.), *Mies van der Rohe - Frühe Bauten, Probleme der Erhaltung - Probleme der Bewertung*, Petersberg, Michael Imhof Verlag, 2004, 151-162 and Dietrich Neumann, "Das Haus Ryder in Wiesbaden (1923) und die Zusammenarbeit zwischen Ludwig Mies van der Rohe und Gerhard Severain", *Architectura*, n. 2, 36/2006, Berlin, DKV, 199-220, 200.
- 28 *Berliner Architekturwelt* n. 10, 1908. Issue 11, 406. Reprint in Thomas Steigenberger, *op. cit.*, 155.
- 29 Museum of Modern Art, New York, Mies van der Rohe Archives, Interview with Dirk Lohan, 1968, in Franz Schulze, Edward Windhorst, *op. cit.*, 9, 11.
- 30 *Id.*, 13, Fn. 8; Fritz Neumeyer, *Das Kunstlose Wort, Gedanken zur Baukunst*,

- Berlin, Siedler, 1986, 59–61, Fn. 12.
- 31 Dietrich Neumann, *op. cit.*, 199.
- 32 Museum of Modern Art, New York, Mies van der Rohe Archives, Mies personal Documents. Folder #2.
- 33 Thomas Al. Greifeld (ed.), *Peter Foerster 1887–1948. Leben und Werk*, Aachen–Dessau, Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum, 1998, 80.
- 34 *Id.*, 199.
- 35 Thomas Steigenberger, *op. cit.*, 154, 160–161.
- 36 Thomas Al. Greifeld, *op. cit.*, 80–82.
- 37 *Id.*, 148–149.
- 38 Interview with Mathilde Schillings, daughter of Ferdinand Goebbels, on 12 April 2010. Unpublished Manuscript, Gisela Anger, Aachen.
- 39 Denazification file in the state archives of Nordrhein-Westfalen, Duisburg. In his denazification form, Ferdinand Goebbels claims to have been “Meisterschüler bei Professor Peter Behrens, Berlin”.
- 40 Berlin Address books of 1912 and 13.
- 41 Ulrike Eichhorn, *Le Corbusier in Berlin 1910/11 I*, Berlin, epubli, 2014, 36. “Im Falle einer Anstellung, würde ich in Neu-Babelsberg leben müssen, dass heißt auf dem Land. So machen es seine dreizehn Mitarbeiter” (Letter to his parents, 18 October 1910).
- 42 Thomas Steigenberger, *op. cit.*, 162.
- 43 Museum of Modern Art, New York, Mies van der Rohe Archives, Interview with Dirk Lohan, 1968, in Franz Schulze, Edward Windhorst, *op. cit.*, 17.
- 44 Thomas Steigenberger, *op. cit.*, 154 and Dietrich Neumann, *op. cit.*, 200.
- 45 Wolf Tegethoff, *op. cit.*, 138–140, Fn. 9; Franz Schulze, Edward Windhorst, *op. cit.*, 31–34. Mies was registered as an architect in his family home at 84 Vaalser Strasse until 1912. See Adam Oellers, *op. cit.*, 1. The house and some of the facilities are preserved at the address, 314 Vaalser Strasse, after the renumbering of the street.
- 46 For questions of authorship see Wolf Tegethoff, *op. cit.*, 140–141.
- 47 *Id.*, 142.
- 48 Berlin Address books of 1912 and 13: entries for Franz Dominick and Ludwig Mies at *Südenstraße 14*. Letter of Ferdinand Goebbels and Ludwig Mies to Ernst Werner, 2 October 1912, Bauhaus Archive Berlin. For Severain’s flat see Dietrich Neumann, *op. cit.*, 200 and Berlin Address book of 1911.
- 49 Wolf Tegethoff, *op. cit.*, 145–146; Franz Schulze, Edward Windhorst, *op. cit.*, 47.
- 50 Bauhaus Archive Berlin, Letter of L. Mies to E. Werner, 25 September 1913.
- 51 Engagement invitation of Ferdinand Goebbels and Berta Kinkartz, 4 July 1913, private collection Schillings.
- 52 Wolf Tegethoff, *op. cit.*, 150.
- 53 Thomas Al. Greifeld, *op. cit.*, 80: “Sie suchten einen Künstlernamen aus für Mies, der eigentlich Louis Mies hieß, er wurde nun “Mies van der Robe”. Pitt sollte nun nach Mies ‘Pitt van Aken’ heißen, was er aber nicht wollte”.
- 54 For the circumstances of the pseudonym ‘Mies van der Robe’ see Andreas Marx, Paul Weber, “Von Ludwig Mies zu Mies van der Robe”, in Helmut Reuter, Birgit Schulte (ed.), *Mies und das Neue Wohnen. Räume, Möbel, Fotografie*, Ostfildern, Hatje Cantz, 2008, 25–39.
- 55 City Archives Aachen, Birth certificate of Ludwig Mies. Her maiden name on the family gravestone in Aachen’s West Cemetery is also written with the acute accent.
- 56 Museum of Modern Art, New York, Mies van der Rohe Archives, Projects/General Correspondence 1920s, Folder #5.
- 57 Franz Schulze, Edward Windhorst, *op. cit.*, 75. Namely: *Friedrichstrasse Office Building (1921)*, *Glass Skyscraper (1922)*, *Brick Country House (1922)*, *Concrete Country House (1923)*, *Concrete office building (1923)*.
- 58 Helmut Reuter, Wolf Tegethoff, Rolf Sachsse, “Mies und die Fotografien I. Verzeichnis der Fotografien, mit denen das Berliner Atelier Mies van der Robes bis 1938 Öffentlichkeitsarbeit betrieb”, in Helmut Reuter, Birgit Schulte (ed.), *op. cit.*, 230–251.
- 59 Museum of Modern Art, New York, Mies van der Rohe Archives, *op. cit.* Literally: “Der Umstand dass ich nicht in Aachen sondern von Berlin aus die Bearbeitung einer solchen Arbeit vornehme, dürfte Sie nicht hindern mich mit der Ausarbeitung eines solchen Projektes zu betrauen, da ohne Schwierigkeit in Aachen selbst eine geeignete Persönlichkeit zu finden wäre der man die Bauleitung anvertrauen kann”.
- 60 Interview with Mathilde Schillings, *op. cit.*
- 61 Helmut Reuter, *op. cit.*, 304–305, 578–579.
- 62 *Id.*, 19–20.
- 63 Eduard Teichmann, *Das erste deutsche Hochhaus mit vollständig eiserner Tragkonstruktion. Deutsche Bauzeitung*, 60. Jg., n. 23, 20, März 1926, 41–46; Helmut Reuter, *op. cit.*, 304.
- 64 Holger Dux, *op. cit.*, 42–45.
- 65 Interview with Mathilde Schillings, *op. cit.*

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Maike Scholz

After architecture studies at RWTH Aachen University and *Ecole d’Architecture de Toulouse*, she received a Master in Conservation of Monuments and sites at Raymond Lemaire International Center for Conservation at KU Leuven University, Belgium. She worked in conservation projects in Brussels, Belgium, for 11 years, and she is a specialist for *Art Nouveau* and early modernist buildings. Maike has worked as a conservation architect in Aachen, Germany, since 2016. The authors, Maike Scholz and Daniel Lohman, are married and live in Aachen, Germany.